New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1951

Volume XII, Number 25 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of November 26, 1951

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1951 PRODUCTIONS

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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A Valuable and Authoritative Record of the Contemporary Theatre

"Never Say Never"

The New York Times

November 21, 1951

Carl Leo's 'Never Say Never' Is a Comedy About the Independence of New York's Young People

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Now and then "Never Say Never" does sound like a smart comedy about the follies of New York. Carl Leo, who wrote it, does have that giddy attitude out of which smart comedies occasionally come and he can put a funny line together correctly.

But this is taking a rather magnanimous attitude toward the lower Fifth Avenue comedy that opened at the Booth last evening. The main fact about it are dismal, such as the plot and the confusion and the stereotyped assumption that the man from Idaho is a wholesome dope and the people of New York are iniquitous wizards. Despite a number of amusing lines, "Never Say Never" is a sophomoric piece of sophistication.

* * *

Not that a smart comedy always needs an original plot. In Mr. Leo's case, an old beau comes from Idaho to court an Idaho girl who is now living in sin with a ghost writer north of Greenwich Village. Coralie Jones, the girl, refuses to marry Alex Wesley, the ghost writer, because she has an independent mind.

"Never Say Never" is chiefly concerned with Coralie's efforts to keep the Idaho suitor from knowing that she is such a daring free spirit. He and Alex have to be kept apart. This requires a lot of confusion, mysteries and bad feeling, and also a scene of furious intoxication. The man from Idaho goes out like a light.

Since "Never Say Never" comes to life only at intervals, there is a lot of time for a theatregoer to brood, and the thoughts are frightening. Isn't this where young people came in with a fine show of sin after the first World War? Assignations for high moral principles? The struggle of young poets and young writers to rise in society? The philistinism of everybody who lives west of the Hudson, or west of Eighth Avenue, for that matter? Apart from the inadequacies of the play as a job of writing, there is something disarmingly innocent about Mr. Leo's cosmopolitanism.

* * *

It has been charmingly set by Frederick Fox, who has given his penniless young lovers an attractive, roomy, and tastefully furnished apartment that must cost about $175 a month. As the enterprising ghost-writer, Hugh Reilly acts with style worthy of a keener piece of work. He has more than one string to his bow as an actor and he can play some humorous variations on the author's theme.

As the liberated young lady, Anne Jackson gives a pert and lively performance. Nita Talbot has some sardonically amusing scenes as a tall, dumb blonde with an instinct for business. Don Briggs plays the gentleman from Idaho satisfactorily, and Royal Beal and Haim Winant complete the cast obligingly.

In the direction Robert B. Sinclair has carried out the playwright's orders with professional skill. Everybody on the stage is more professional than the man who never said never to the idea of writing a smart comedy out of some obsolete conventions.

"NEVER SAY NEVER"

Comedy by Carl Leo; staged by Robert B. Sinclair; setting by Frederick Fox; costumes by Alice Gibson; presented by Albert H. Rosen and Lester Meyer at the Booth Theatre, November 20, 1951. The cast:

Coralie Jones..... Anne Jackson
Gloria Sampson..... Nita Talbot
Alex Wesley..... Hugh Reilly
Lester B. Sprawls.. Don Briggs
Maxie Jordan..... Haim Winant
Jasper Hornblower 3d.....
Royal Beal

Synopsis: The action of the play takes place in an apartment off lower Fifth Ave., New York. Act I. Scene 1. October. Late afternoon. Scene 2. Later that night. Act II. Scene 1. The next morning. Scene 2. Late afternoon. The same day. Act III. An hour later.

Journal American

November 21, 1951

A Triangle Comedy—With Farce Overtone

By ROBERT GARLAND

It's a shame that Carl Leo didn't do more work on "Never Say Never" before Albert Rosen and Lester Meyer brought it into the Booth. Last night's new play could have been better than it is. A whole lot better. Now, like the bishop's egg, it's only good in spots.

The author, a working newsreel editor, admits that "Never Say Never" is his first produced play. As an initial effort, it's promising. But it could have been much more than that. Much more! The stuff that makes a play good rather than promising is mostly there.

But not for any length of time. As soon as Mr. Leo gets going, sometimes before, he ends that scene and switches to another. And his dialog is good only now and then. When it's good, it's good. And when it's not, it's something else again.

Under Robert Sinclair's direction, the cast plays as if they had read this review. And paid attention to it. When "Never Say Never" isn't at its best, neither are the players. They could be.

I wish Gilda Dahlberg had kept "Never Say Never" out of town until Carl Leo had time to work some more on it. Isn't that what production associates are for?

* * *

Many Overtones

Carl Leo's first produced play is called a comedy. But it's a comedy with many a farcical overtone. Showing how Coralie Jones and Alex Wesley live together without benefit of clergy, it also shows how Lester B. Sprawls loves—or thinks he loves—Coralie Jones, too.

Lester B. Sprawls is a man from Coralie Jones' home town. There, in distant Idaho, people aren't as broadminded as they're supposed to be in little old New York. Especially down near Washington Square. So, when Mr. Sprawls drops in for a visit for a day or so—

Well Miss Jones and Mr. Wesley try to keep out of each other's way. It's Miss Jones' idea. But Mr. Wesley agrees. Or pretends to agree. And that's about all "Never Say Never" has to relate. Except that the two men meet and meet again. Neither trusts the other.

Then there's Gloria Sampson, who lives upstairs and comes barging into the Coralie Jones-Alex Wesley apartment whenever it's inconvenient. Miss Sampson is a Billie Dawn as frequently as she is able. Dumb like a fox, she's a pet of mine at the Booth. She's a pet of everybody's.

There're a couple of other characters and a deal that must be consummated before "Never Say Never" is done with. Comedy turns to farce before the evening finishes. And not too soon.

* * *

Acting Up and Down

The actors provided by Mr. Rosen and Mr. Meyer, not to say by Miss Dahlberg, their associate, act up-and-downey. Nita Talbot the least of all. She, as Gloria Sampson, is almost consistently delightful. She has seen Judy Holliday in "Born Yesterday."

Anne Jackson isn't bad as Coralie Jones, who, plotfully, cares what the folks back home will think. She plays comedy more naturally than farce. So does Hugh Reilly, the Alex Wesley who hates to have his life disarranged by visiting firemen, warm and bothered.

As Lester B. Sprawls, the warm and bothered visiting fireman, Don Briggs isn't as bucolic as he's supposed to be. Visiting firemen usually aren't. Haim Winant and Royal Beal complete the picture as Maxie Jordan and Jasper Hornblower 3d, New Yorkers.

The setting, by Frederick Fox, serves for the goings-on. So do the costumes by Alice Gibson. The direction by Robert Sinclair is mentioned before the featured players in the program. So the producers, including the associate, must find it's mighty good.

Personally, I still think it's a shame that Carl Leo didn't do more work on "Never Say Never" before it came to 45th st. The new play at the Booth could have been a whole lot better than it is.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
November 21, 1951

By WALTER F. KERR

"NEVER SAY NEVER," at the Booth, is a comedy for people who ask nothing more than a young couple living in what used to be called sin, and a setting in which living room, bedroom, and liquor cabinet are simultaneously exposed to view.

Author Carl Leo has provided the companionable couple—he is a ghost writer, she a part-time poet—and Frederick Fox has provided the x-ray setting. Beyond that, no one has done much of anything to keep the play going, the audience amused, or this incredible season from surrendering altogether.

Such complication as Mr. Leo has provided revolves entirely around the unexpected arrival of a former suitor of the girl's. He is a hayseed, vintage 1913. He comes from Idaho Falls, and he loudly proclaims, to no laughter at all, that he doesn't know anything about art.

For some reason that was never clear to me, the girl is at once thrown into a panic for fear the hick shall discover the truth about her living arrangements, and for two long acts, almost without interruption, she is busy stashing away telltale signs of male life about the place.

Unless I missed something, the yokel never does catch on, leaving the playwright with an exact zero in the way of dramatic conflict. That there is a third act at all depends entirely on the fact that the visitor is flattened by a handy vase—yes, again—at the end of the second act, and we are thereafter concerned with the rich comic problem of bringing him to.

The precise quality of the play is hard to define. Basically, it is the kind of comedy in which a character who is about to leave the stage, and for whose exit you are fervently praying, whirls himself around, says something like "Just a minute now, this man has made a very serious accusation!" and the fat is in the fire all over again.

The performers do what they can with it, if not what ought to have been done. As a matter of fact, at least two of them try for a rather arresting variation on the playing style which is normally thought suitable for this sort of thing. Instead of pushing themselves like racehorses and wreaking havoc with their throats, Anne Jackson and Hugh Reilly, as the young couple, go in for casual asides and an assortment of confidential mumbles. I am not sure that this is a workable comedy method, but it comes as a blessed relief from the high-pitched mania of certain earlier treats of the season.

Let it be said in passing that Miss Jackson and Mr. Reilly are both personable people. Let it also be said that Don Briggs, as the hick, stands there like a man and says everything that has been written for him. Honesty compels the further admission that he gets some laughs, though they are lonesome in the surroundings. And Nita Talbot, as one of those heavy-lidded blonde vacuums, seems to me a really accomplished comedienne.

While we are salvaging something from a profoundly grim evening, it is worth noting that the Frederick Fox set is dandy. It is not only attractive and serviceable, it actually looks—with its odd angles and unpredictable partitions—like the converted house it is supposed to be.

Otherwise, never.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun
November 21, 1951

'Never Say Never' A Bit Mysterious

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

A man behind me at "Never Say Never" last night announced during the second act, "it's very cute. It's light."

Whether or not you agree about the cuteness, the play certainly is light. In fact it is so weightless that it is almost impossible to figure out what its intentions are. Occasionally it is funny. More often it is just complicated and talkative.

It suffers desperately from there being no reason for anything that happens.

The hero and heroine are living together without being married. The only explanation for this is that the girl is contemptuous of respectability.

An old beau of the girl's comes to town and she makes her lover move out for the evening. The only explanation for this is that she wishes to preserve her respectability.

Contradictions.

This sort of battledore-and-shuttlecock reasoning goes on all evening. The visitor is a bore, but the girl spends days with him. She treats her lover like a castoff bum, all the time insisting that she adores him.

There is a devious complication about a ghost-writing job the boy is doing, which will either expose, or not expose, something about horse racing. This point was never made clear. It involves him with offstage fights, gamblers, and police.

He is accused of bribery and as a result gets his first assignment of writing under his own name. This point, like the others, left me thoroughly mystified.

Convincing.

Hugh Reilly, as the ghost writer living in sin, comes off more happily than anyone else in the cast. He plays the role for complete sympathy, which is fair enough. He also develops some amusing comic moments by playing them with intense sincerity.

Anne Jackson as his unofficial mate has a difficult time getting any sympathy at all. There is nothing either endearing or smart about the character. Miss Jackson elects to try to save it by acting warm and serious most of the time. The unfortunate result is that she seems to have no particular relation to, or fondness for, the play or the other people in it.

Don Briggs does all he can with the goony role of the girl's old beau. He misunderstands, gets drunk, and loses his temper, with undistinguished aplomb.

Most of the evening's laughs are provided by Nita Talbot, a tall blonde with an adenoidal voice and an agreeable, bland way of pretending she has no brains.

New York Post
November 21, 1951

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Play Called 'Never Say Never'

The new play that opened at the Booth last night is called "Never Say Never," and at least its title offers good advice for critics. Never say that you have never seen a worse comedy than the offering you have just encountered. If you do, the one you attend the following evening may strike you as even more inept, and after a few weeks your complaints will begin to seem a little monotonous. So I won't insist on any unpleasant superlatives about "Never Say Never." I'll merely say that I thought it extremely dismal.

It is also quite cultured. Carl Leo, its author, makes his heroine a poet, includes references to Enoch Soames and Plutarch in his dialogue, and develops some sort of esoteric theory about the difference between people who admire Yellowstone Park and those who prefer the Whitney Museum. I gather he has more respect for the latter group. He likewise expresses distaste for those who call a noonday meal "brunch," and, at that point, I found myself sympathetic toward his play.

Without Clergy

In outline, "Never Say Never" is simple enough. It is about a girl and boy living together in New York without help of clergy, and a dully respectable business man from the girl's home town who tries to come between them. This, I suppose, makes the comedy sophisticated, but the playwright is taking no chances. He points out carefully that the lack of a marital bond is due to the heroine's idealistic, if mistaken, conviction that marriages sometimes don't work out very well. At the end, of course, they decide on matrimony, after all.

It is only fair for me to admit that I know about this final matrimonial step only by hearsay. I wasn't present at the time. To tell you the truth, as I always try to do, I didn't stay for the final scene of "Never Say Never." I have sat through "Buy Me Blue

Ribbons," "Faithfully Yours," "Love and Let Love" and "To Dorothy, a Son," but somehow I couldn't stick with last night's comedy. I was afraid that longer attendance might prejudice me against it.

Without Harm

It is certainly not that there is anything outrageous about it. Despite its toying with sin, it certainly is a most harmless little work. But it did seem to me that Mr. Leo has written a curiously flat, stale and unprofitable play, and that the playing, while pleasant and talented enough, was totally unable to make it entertaining or engaging. The drama season, it must be admitted, reaches some low ebbs these evenings.

The acting, as I have tried to suggest, struck me as wholesome. Anne Jackson is the troubled girl poet, Hugh Reilly is the young man who believes in matrimony, and Don Briggs is the presumably boorish business man, and all of them have proved in the past that they are worthy of better things. I have a suspicion that their comedy is a notably dreary striving after fun and sophistication, but I won't say I never saw anything duller. Its title has taught me a lesson.

Daily Mirror

November 21, 1951

'Never Say Never' Packs Amusing Wallop

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Albert H. Rosen and Lester Meyer brought a pleasant little comedy, called "Never Say Never," to the Booth Theatre last evening. It introduces a talented writer in Carl Leo to Broadway. Leo, graduate of the newsreel and film studios, has a fine flair for amusing dialogue, though he has something to learn yet about dramatic construction.

The new arrival has to do with a free-lance ghost writer and a pretty, young poet from Idaho who share an apartment on lower Fifth Avenue, but find marriage—at least the girl, does—just too conventional. Then up pops an old beau from her home town to take in the sights and persuade her to return with him.

Like most small-town farcical characters, the visitor proves to be stuffy and pompous. He almost succeeds in losing the wordsmith a profitable job profiling a millionaire horseman. But everything is straightened out in time for a happy ending.

"Never Say Never" packs a lot of laugh wallops, but they come at disturbingly infrequent intervals. There are too many curtains for the three acts. Every time Leo starts the audience to chuckling with an hilarious episode, he seems to run out of gas and resorts to a time lapse.

An excellent cast performs spiritedly under the expert direction of Robert B. Sinclair. Anne Jackson and Hugh Reilly are attractive as the avant-garde romantics. Don Briggs is properly obtuse and annoying as the go-getter from Idaho. And Royal Beal is good as the wealthy improver of the breed.

A special salute is due Nita Talbot, as a tall, willowy, blonde model with a dumb stare and a drawling voice. Leo has penned some of his best lines for her, and she delivers them with telling effect. She should prove one of the discoveries of the season.

Frederick Fox has designed another of his atmospheric settings.

With a dearth of comedies on Broadway, "Never Say Never" offers an entertaining evening in the theatre for escapists who aren't too demanding. Leo is a welcome addition to our list of young playwrights. He has a civilized sense of humor, and should give us a solid comedy when he has learned to exhaust all the possibilities in a situation, to avoid too many curtains.

Judging by the robust laughter and applause of the first-nighters, they found "Never Say Never" delightful. We did, too, on occasion. We only regret the occasions weren't sufficiently numerous.

DAILY NEWS

November 21, 1951

'Never Say Never' a Stage Jalopy Assembled from Wornout Parts

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Of the many ineffectual plays I've seen this season, this new one at the Booth, "Never Say Never," sticks closest to formula. I don't think the author, Carl Leo, really wrote it—he assembled it from old and worn parts and then the producers, Albert H. Rosen and Lester Meyer, found some actors willing to play the parts.

One of the parts is the "writer" who is working on a "story." He is the hero. He is a jerk and if I found him working for me I'd fire him. I am very tired of "writers" working on "stories" in—quote comedies—unquote, for they are bores. They try to be witty and brilliant, but the devilish thing about being a character in a play is that it is impossible to be any more brilliant or witty than the author of the play.

Another of the parts is the dumb broad who makes nitwit remarks with a dead pan and a flat voice. She always gets a laugh line for an exit and every time she goes out the door the audience applauds her.

The Butter and Egg Man.

Then there is the dull fellow—the earnest, smug and successful chap from some small town out West who is too stupid to see he is making a fool of himself. Very few playwrights seem to realize that a dull fellow is a dull fellow, on or off stage, and hardly worth one's paying money to listen to him.

Frequently the heroine—as she was last night—is a New York career girl who is living with a man without being married to him because she thinks wedlock would spoil her individuality. This poor young thing never seems to realize that her individuality was spoiled long before she was born, by formula playwrights of a past generation.

Usually the career girl and the writer are the ones to shack up, and so they do in "Never Say Never"—in an apartment on the fringe of Gwch Vlg, of course. But before the audience goes home they have to get married, natch.

Any Plot Will Do.

Without half trying you can put all these parts into almost any kind of plot — something, say, about the dull fellow coming to rescue the career girl from the wickedness of the big city—and the chances are better than even that you'll have written "Never Say Never."

Last night's actors were okay. Nita Talbot, a willowy blonde with a baby stare and a babe voice, does the dumb broad. Hugh Reilly, a competent, straightforward player, does the journalistic stiff. Don Briggs manfully takes his beating as the dull fellow, and Anne Jackson is the career girl who won't marry Mr. Reilly until the last moment of the comedy—a moment which comes none too soon.

"To Dorothy, a Son"

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 20, 1951

'Son to Dorothy' No Blessed Event

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

When a hit from London strikes no sparks in Manhattan, people are usually at a loss to explain. "To Dorothy, a Son," unfortunately looks like a familiar story, but with at least one clear explanation.

The character most in evidence in the comedy is a Texas girl, a mercenary operator, who is officious, a liar and pretty stupid. The English may find that her worship of a million dollars is hilarious satire on materialistic American success.

On 45th St., she is not funny, even though played for a kind of belated sympathy. The afterthought makes her a misty, inconsistent character, but fails to earn her any affection.

Every Possible Device.

The slender farce hangs on a will which bequeaths a million dollars to the son of Dorothy's mate, if he be born within a certain time. The money comes from a deceased relative of the first wife of Dorothy's said husband. The dead man presumably assumed that his niece and the young man would still be married. The relative certainly anticipated no Dorothy.

The first wife arrives on the scene just as Dorothy is to be delivered of a child. From there on, every possible device concerning false marriage and phony divorce is used to prolong the action.

Dorothy herself is in bed, unseen but constantly heard, in a scrim-walled bedroom through the entire action.

Hail Young Howard!

The most interesting element of the production is the local stage debut of Ronald Howard, son of the late Leslie Howard—and a warmly auspicious debut it seems to be.

A lanky, even gawky version of his father, young Howard reveals a pleasing, instinctive gift for light comedy. He plays the twice-married composer with the same sort of gentle authority and relaxed honesty which marked Leslie Howard's fine performances.

In a script that has no wealth of witty lines, he elaborates and sustains comical situations, and entirely convinces you that this harassed young man is true.

The Showier Role.

Hildy Parks has the showier female role as the second wife from Texas. The part has no definite pattern. It suddenly switches from a shrewd operator to a silly goon, leaving Miss Parks like a child with a handful of string and no kite.

Stella Andrew, lovely heroine of last year's "Ring Round the Moon," is the invisible Dorothy. She does a foursquare job of creating a character the way it is done on radio. The sight of her at the curtain causes a sense of retroactive loss.

Neil Fitzgerald plays a series of walk-ons, and Martin Rudy is the determined new fiance of Dorothy's predecessor.

"TO DOROTHY, A SON"

Comedy by Roger MacDougall, in collaboration with Otis Bigelow; staged by Herman Shumlin; setting by William and Jean Eckart; costumes by Hazel Roy; presented by Mr. Shumlin at the John Golden Theatre, November 19, 1951. The cast:

Evelyn Ridgeway..Ronald Howard
Dorothy Ridgeway..Stella Andrew
Hank Thompson....Martin Rudy
Alice.....Hildy Parks
Postman, taxi driver, 2d taxi driver, landlord, Dr. Cameron..Neil Fitzgerald
Nurse.....Rosalynd Avery

Synopsis: The action of the play takes place in the Ridgeways' cottage in Chiswick, a suburb of London, England. The time is the present. Act I. A spring morning. Act II. Scene 1. Following morning. Scene 2. Next morning. Act III. About five hours later.

DAILY NEWS

November 20, 1951

'To Dorothy, a Son,' One of Those Mild, Polite, Slow English Farces

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The plot of "To Dorothy, a Son," a long-run English hit which Herman Shumlin offered us last evening at the Golden Theatre, hangs on the difference in time between Britain and the U. S. A. So does my reaction to this comedy. What is timely on the Greenwich Meridian is rather late for here.

Roger MacDougall's polite little farce has, as the saying goes, some interesting moments and it also has two very enjoyable comedians in Ronald Howard and Hildy Parks—but I don't think it has the pace for the Western World. It seems to be built on the theory that one mustn't make an Englishman laugh too hard or too often, lest he hurt himself.

Probably the soundest bit of humor in "To Dorothy, a Son" is the business of an open-hearted Texas girl throwing money around—for open-hearted Texans throwing money around always have been really-truly funny. But the plot machinery also incorporates some elaborate but leisurely business about who gets a million dollars (still a lot of dough in London) depending on whether or not a gentleman infant is born in a London suburb before 9 A. M. Houston, or Central Standard, Time. There also are further technicalities as to whether a Mexican divorce is good or ain't it, and is it yesterday or tomorrow across the International Date Line.

Chip Off Old Block.

I'll have to tell a little of this just to introduce the actors. Mr. Howard, who looks much like his late, noted father, Leslie Howard, is a penniless composer of music for film documentaries who is married to one wife, Stella Andrew, who is pregnant, and thinks he is divorced from another wife, Miss Parks, who is Texan. Mr. Howard is a good and very likeable young comedian. Miss Parks is the prettiest, cutest and sauciest little dish of the season, and I admire her right down to her fingernails. There I stop, for she has white enamel on them.

Mr. MacDougall's play has some funny, offhand lines and bits of business—like Mr. Howard slavering at the sight of an American-style steak or Miss Parks trying to cut a telephone line with a nail file—and it has a couple of elements of novelty. Miss Andrew, who plays Dorothy, the lady who must deliver the goods by 9 A. M. C. S. T., has a full-size part in the farce but never is seen. She is in her bed, anticipating, for two and eight-tenths acts, and the head of the bed hides her from view. Nice British delicacy. And one actor, Neil Fitzgerald, plays five roles—a postman, two taxi drivers, a landlord and an obstetrician. It's quite a lot of fun for Mr. Fitzgerald—but if Actors' Equity hears about it, the union might ask producer Shumlin to employ four standbys.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

November 20, 1951

By WALTER F. KERR

Not Worth the Pain

THE million dollar inheritance went out some time ago as a peg for runabout farce, but the authors of "To Dorothy, a Son," which opened at the Golden last night, have at least put a new dress on it. This time they have made the inheritance turn on the timely birth of a baby and put us as close to the impending event as taste and theatrical practicality will allow. Otherwise they have made no notable addition to the stage tradition of round-the-clock contests, or to the merriment of the present season.

The twist which Roger Macdougal and Otis Bigelow have managed to impose on this venerable formula has some serious disadvantages. For one thing, the expectant wife has been discreetly confined to an offstage room, where she must voice her commands, laments and rare endearments in tones normally heard only on the platforms of railway stations. That her long-suffering husband does not dispatch her to her eternal reward before the first-act curtain is down is a tribute to the stamina which the authors have imagined for him, but his forebearance is impossible to believe.

For another, the poor girl, whom we never see, is expected to compete romantically with an onstage lass of some personal charm, and if we are unable to work up much interest in the problem of which girl snags the harried husband, the authors have only themselves to blame.

To Stella Andrews, who made an impressive Broadway debut in last season's "Ring Around the Moon," falls the unhappy lot of having to make something of the bed-ridden tyrant. She is exactly miscast. Lovely to look at, and possessed of rather trying vocal equipment, she is here forced to conceal her virtues and magnify her faults.

Ronald Howard is somewhat better off. Cast as a penniless composer who is at the moment hacking away at a score for a documentary film on wood pulp, and simultaneously ministering to his wife, he at least has the run of the stage. He takes it in stride, tangling himself in the familiar telephone wires of this kind of farce, ironing clothes, squeezing oranges, and permitting a vase of flowers to be shattered over his skull. Mr. Howard would seem to be a man of some talent. In his few moments of repose, he is easy and engaging, and every once in a while he suggests that, behind the frantic necessities of the evening, he is concealing a wry and precise sense of humor. If he is not the extrovert farceur who could have "To Dorothy, A Son," there is a real question whether the actor lives who could pump life into the strained and overdrawn play.

Hildy Parks, as the other woman, is pert and pretty in her short-cropped curls, and she has a nicely baffled expression when she needs it. Unfortunately, she needs it too often as the play pyramids its merely tricky, and sometimes exasperating, complications. The company as a whole is finally shrill in its effort to make the proceedings seem gay and bubbling, and "To Dorothy, a Son," must go down as an exhausting evening.

The New York Times

November 20, 1951

Roger MacDougall's 'To Dorothy, a Son' Brings Us a Second Generation Howard From England

By BROOKS ATKINSON

If "To Dorothy, a Son" were not such a silly and futile comedy, the name of Ronald Howard would not appear in the first sentence of this bulletin. He is not that remarkable as an actor yet. But Roger MacDougall's play, which opened at the John Golden last evening, is so unbearably trite that a stricken theatregoer has to look around for something with which to ease his aching mind.

"To Dorothy, a Son" is the sort of mediocre play that should not be subjected to the effort and expense of crossing the Atlantic. On the home grounds in England it may have forgiving friends who would rather look at it than think about things that are worse. Not every Londoner can attend "South Pacific" every night and worship Mary Martin from a discreet distance across the footlights.

* * *

But in New York, Mr. MacDougall's farcical gewgaw makes for a pretty dismal evening among discarded relics. Now that we have got as far toward the millennium as 1951, playwrights really ought to stop knocking together comedies about wills. The question of who gets the money and by what trickery seems irrelevant today, and invariably involves uninteresting people hopped-up about boring things.

Some erudite reader is bound to call this department's attention to a scintillating comedy of recent times that grows out of the hocus-pocus of a will, for art refuses to conform even to a sensible plan. But don't cite "The Little Foxes" as a comedy about a will. It is about things much more fundamental than that, and it is not a comedy.

But let's consider sweeter topics. The part of the potential parent of Dorothy's son and the possible heir to a million smackers is ably and pleasantly acted by the son of Leslie Howard. To millions of theatregoers who loved Ronald Howard's father, there is something remarkably ingratiating about seeing another member of the clan moving around cheerfully on a stage. Young Mr. Howard looks a little like his father and sounds a lot like him and has the same mild, disinterested sense of humor.

* * *

"To Dorothy, a Son" is no match for "Just Suppose," in which Leslie Howard first set his mark on America thirty-one years ago. And Ronald would no doubt be much relieved if people would quit comparing him with his father. All this column wishes to do is to say a word of welcome and report that his ambling, droll performance is the only thing that relieves the dullness of a banal play.

Not that Hildy Parks, Martin Rudy and Neil Fitzgerald are not all right, nor that Stella Andrew as accouchement Dorothy does not do as well as she can, considering the fact that we keep hearing her but never see her. "To Dorothy, a Son" throws them all and it has not stimulated Herman Shumlin into doing his keenest work as the director.

Journal American

November 20, 1951

Leslie Howard's Son Does a Splendid Job

By ROBERT GARLAND

There's an old theatrical saying that where there's a will, there's a play. This time the play's "To Dorothy, A Son." Roger MacDougal, an Englishman, wrote it and it's running successfully at some London theatre. I think the theatre is the Garrick.

While shopping overseas, Herman Shumlin saw it. Seeing it, he thought it was a bargain. So he bought it for this country in general, for New York in particular. That's how it got to the Golden with an all-American cast and an added character.

Part of "To Dorothy, A Son" is Ronald Howard. Mr. Howard looks like Leslie Howard's son. He is! Although he's making his American on-stage debut, he has acted time and again in England. You must have seen him in the motion-pictures.

You'll remember Mr. MacDougal's play, if you remember it at all, as the play in which Leslie Howard's son made his American debut as an off-screen actor. He's a promising farceur, is Ronald Howard in West 45th Street.

I wish his surroundings were as promising. But, with the rosiest of glasses, I can't discern their merit.

* * *

Concerns a Will

The farcical importation at the Golden has to do with Dorothy Ridgeway and will or won't she have a son by a given hour of a given day in a given year. That's Uncle Somebody's testament. He lived in Texas, in the United States of America.

In the action of "To Dorothy, A Son" taking place in Chiswick, near the London which is in England, there's a goodish difference in time. When it's three o'clock on-stage at the Golden, it's later—or is it earlier?—in Houston, Texas.

So Dorothy, who has her son during four scenes of a three-act farce, isn't sure whether she meets the requirements of Uncle Somebody's will until near the end. By then, I don't really care, one way or the other. Nor, I think, do you.

But Dorothy, whom you never see, does. She cares most awfully. In the voice of Stella Andrew, she keeps her fellows jumping. She wants everything from a glass of orange juice to a male baby. By the end of "To Dorothy, A Son," she gets them.

And a female baby. For Doro-